

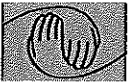
Center for *Children's* Advocacy

University of Connecticut School of Law, 65 Elizabeth Street, Hartford, CT 06105

H.B. No. 6824 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH 2017, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR AND OTHER PROVISIONS RELATED TO REVENUE

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Center for Children's Advocacy, a statewide private, non-profit legal organization. The Center provides holistic legal representation for poor children in Connecticut's communities through individual representation and systemic advocacy. I am an attorney at the Center and Director of the Teen Legal Advocacy Project, which provides legal services to teens throughout the state. In addition, I am the chair of the Homeless Youth Workgroup of the Reaching Home campaign, the statewide campaign for preventing and ending homelessness. The Campaign developed a public-private partnership to implement a statewide framework to prevent and end homelessness based on the federal Opening Doors plan. The workgroup consists of state agency partners, private providers and advocates. More information about the Reaching Home Campaign and the workgroup can be found here: <http://pschousing.org/runaway-and-homeless-youth-workgroup>.

I write today to underscore the importance of maintaining the funding for the homeless youth program established in Conn. Gen. Stat. § 17a-62a. The Homeless Youth Program passed in 2010 with wide bipartisan support. The program provides critical support to an invisible population in our communities- youth who are on their own and homeless.



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The 2013 study, "Invisible No More: Creating opportunities for youth who are homeless," conducted by The Consultation Center at Yale University¹, documented both the lack of crisis supports in Connecticut and the vulnerability of these youth. The study interviewed 98 homeless youth as well as key stakeholders and found:

- 32% had dropped out of school;
- 12% reported that their school told them they could no longer attend;
- Several youth reported that they had traded sex for money (7.1%), a place to stay (8.2%); and drugs or alcohol (4.1%);
- 23.5% of the youth first experienced sexual intercourse at age 12 or under;
- 66% were unemployed and 26% were employed part-time;
- 41% reported being in their current living situation for less than 3 months;
- 70% reported moving two times or more in the past year; and
- ¼ of the young people reported considering suicide over the last year.

¹ Gordon, D, Hunter, B. (2013). "Invisible No More: Creating opportunities for youth who are homeless." Available at: <http://www.pschousing.org/files/InvisibleNoMoreReport.pdf>.

These statistics are sobering. They tell us that without a safe place to go, homeless youth in Connecticut are falling through the cracks of the various systems they touch.

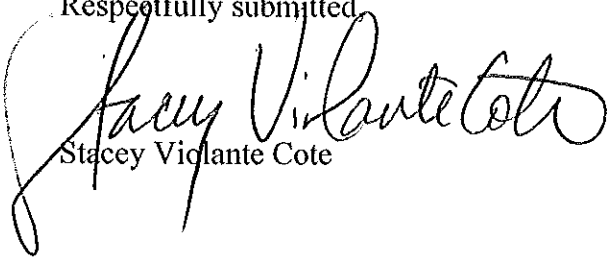
The data is echoed in the voices of the kids I see on a regular basis and who have no place to go. One such young person is "Mellissa" from the greater Hartford area. She just turned eighteen years old, is staying on friends' couches and is trying to finish high school. Her mother and father are experiencing homelessness and she is on her own. Her teachers said she does very well when she is in school but her grades have been suffering as she moves around. She recently texted me to ask how she might be able to get some food because the house she is staying in cannot afford to feed her. Her needs are imminent. Sadly, her story is not uncommon.

We know that many other youth who are homeless experience assaults and victimization as they attempt to find a place to stay. Testimony from the year the Homeless Youth Program was established included young people describing the victimization they endured in adult shelters. (Please see testimony of Gambrell Francois: <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2010/KIDdata/Tmy/2010SB-00292-R000302-Gambarell%20Francois-TMY.PDF>) Currently, there are fewer than ten providers in the state dedicated to serving runaway and homeless youth.

The Reaching Home Campaign and the Center for Children's Advocacy secured private funding and recently completed a comprehensive planning process to address the gaps in services for young people who are homeless. This process included participants from state agencies, private providers, advocates and private funders. The recommendations from the planning process are aligned with the framework developed by the US Interagency Council on Homelessness. In late March we will be releasing the "Blueprint" describing critical next steps to address the needs of youth such as Mellissa.

Continued funding of this critical program is necessary to avoid more costly and serious homelessness later on. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,



Stacey Violante Cote